



# The Absence of America: The London Stage, 1576-1642 (Early Modern Literary Geographies)

*Gavin Hollis*

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*The Absence of America: the London Stage 1576-1642* examines why early modern drama's response to English settlement in the New World was muted, even though the so-called golden age of Shakespeare coincided with the so-called golden age of exploration: no play is set in the Americas; few plays treat colonization as central to the plot; a handful features Native American characters (most of whom are Europeans in disguise). However, advocates of colonialism in the seventeenth century denounced playing companies as enemies on a par with the Pope and the Devil. Instead of writing off these accusers as paranoid cranks, this book takes as its starting point the possibility that they were astute playgoers. By so doing we can begin to see the emergence of a 'picture of America', and of the Virginia colony in particular, across a number of plays performed for London audiences: Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Staple of News*, and his collaboration with Marston and Chapman, *Eastward Ho!*; Robert Greene's *Orlando Furioso*; Massinger's *The City Madam*; Massinger and Fletcher's *The Sea Voyage*; Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*; Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Fletcher and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. We can glean the significance of this picture, not only for the troubled Virginia Company, but also for London theatre audiences. And we can see that the picture that was beginning to form was, as the anti-theatricalists surmised, often slanderous, condemnatory, and, as it were, anti-American.

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